

(From *Today's Trucking* ) GRAIN VALLEY, Mo. -- The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association south of the border is applauding a bill just introduced in the U. S. House of Representatives that limits the amount professional truck drivers can be charged for the background check required to haul hazardous materials.

The bill also directs the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to improve the efficiency of such checks to eliminate redundancy and lost time and income of professional drivers. Representative Russ Carnahan, D-Missouri, has introduced the Professional Driver Background Check Efficiency Act of 2006 (HR5560) that caps the amount professional truck drivers can be charged for the Hazardous Material Endorsement (HME) at \$50 per individual. The legislation also stipulates that professional drivers who have already undergone background checks to receive an HME will not be subject to an additional check to receive a Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) card -- mandated for drivers who access "security sensitive" areas like ports or power plants -- or be required to pay the about \$105 to \$139 fee for this additional check.

The bill also calls for a study and recommendations to Congress on ways to eliminate the redundancy and inefficiency of additional background checks for professional drivers required by other federal agencies including the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy. "We are very pleased with this common sense piece of legislation," said OOIDA President and CEO Jim Johnston. "While professional truck drivers are among those who are most concerned with security in transportation, the scatter-shot approach to security taken so far has left them extremely frustrated.

"You can make the case that a driver should pay a reasonable fee to have a background check, but how many times should you be expected to pay that fee and additional ones that bureaucrats dream up?" he continued. "We have at least one member who has undergone a half dozen background checks for different government agencies, not counting the HME endorsement that comes when he renews his current license. Not only do drivers get charged higher and higher fees for these, but they also have substantial out-of-pocket costs and lost income from the time off work.

"It only makes sense for federal agencies to coordinate their efforts to minimize the cost and improve efficiency."

And that's precisely what Canadian trucking representatives have been saying as well, since the hazmat ID rule takes affect for Canuck haulers in August.

After more than two years of lobbying, the Canadian Trucking Alliance announced that it's confident U.S. authorities will finally agree to accept the FAST card as a substitute for hazardous material background checks.

The CTA has been arguing that a parallel endorsement for Canadian hazmat truck drivers is problematic because, unlike drivers in the U.S., Canadian truckers are not required to have a hazmat endorsement on their commercial licences.

However, knowing that the American trucking industry will not tolerate a situation where U.S. drivers have to meet requirements that Canadian drivers do not, CTA proposed Canadian drivers use their FAST cards as evidence of having undergone virtually identical security checks -- at least on an interim basis.

© 2006 Newcom Business Media Inc.

All Rights Reserved.